DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 085 741 CS 200 917

AUTHOR Clark, Thomas L.
TITLE The Environment of Names in the Classroom.
PUB DATE Nov 71
NOTE 8p.; Paper given at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (61st, Las Vegas, Nov. 24-27, 1971)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Diachronic Linguistics; English Instruction; Environmental Influences; Etymology; *Human Geography; *Interdisciplinary Approach; Lexicology; *Onomastics; *Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

The study of names, onomastics, can hold a fascination for all students at every grade level and in various subjects, provided the study is approached methodically and is adaptable at every grade level. One method is to begin with concentric rings whereby the student looks first at his own name and then moves to names of people and places around him in ever widening categories. Or, one can begin by asking students to look up their given names in a dictionary and providing the student with the chance to do a dictionary exercise. By comparing last names, students can often see patterns of national origin emerging. The histories of etymologies of names can provide interesting stories and a knowledge of the history of the language and can introduce various cultural elements into name selection. Street names, pets' names, the names of cities, topographic names, state names, and so on, can all be incorporated in various interdisciplinary studies. While moving through the various approaches to onomastics, the student can grasp the importance of names study, can begin to see order in the apparent chaos of names surrounding him, and can discover on his own other forms of names. (HOD)

ED 085741

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Perspectives
Perspective 39

Thomas L. Clark
English Dept.
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Las Vegas, Nevada 89109

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Thomas L. Clark
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

The Environment of Names in the Classroom

This paper is the result of three related discoveries made while creating a state of organi-ation for the study of Nevada place names, part of a pilot project for a national survey by the American Names Society. We found a need to interest a number of scholarly minded persons in the survey. Second, we found a need to illustrate that study of names holds a value and fascination for all students at every grade level and in various subjects. Third, there seemed to be a need for methodically introducing students to the world of names. While the first two needs must be discussed, the bulk of this paper is taken up with the third need, that is, proposing a method that is not so much novel as it is practical and usable in various subject areas, by elementary and secondary teachers.

In instituting the Nevada names survey, we were concerned with utilizing not only the resource persons on campus — librarians, historians, geographers, archeologists, cultural anthropologists, and such, but looked forward to that time when the documents would be available which would require large numbers of readers. As happens so often when faced with enormous needs for volunteers, we turned to teachers. Unfortunately, Southern Nevada is not unique in that there simply are not large numbers of teachers who have been exposed to onomastics. But when the subject is discussed, most teachers display enthusiasm for a project which can involve their students. A little proselytizing goes a long way toward achieving

CS 200 917

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

two goals: it involves teachers from various areas in an interdisciplinary project, and it introduces large numbers of students to onomastics.

The second need, to illustrate the value of name study to students, is self evident sometimes only to onomasticians. Examples aid illustration. Historians, hardly need to be told that population movement can be seen in the patterned spread of place names. Sociologists likewise are aware that nationality patterns as seen in groupings of surnames give valuable clues to the demography of a region. In short, everyone can see the value of some particular category of names for his discipline. When it is pointed out that, taken altogether, the number of uses names study serves to every discipline, then curriculum writers see the value of incorporating onomastics through every subject. In fact, I am hard pressed to think of a subject area in which the study of names would not be useful.

Since most of us more or less stumbled into the study of names, it would seem that a methodical approach to introduce students to onomastics would be useful. At the same time, such a method would have to meet the prime criterion of usability: it would have to be adaptable to every grade level. Along the way, students can be introduced rather painlessly to rather minimal amount of jargon used by onomasticians. The language arts teacher can describe the difference between a praenomen and a cognomen, while the geography teacher differentiates between a swamp and a savanna.

A method that works well with students is based on concentric

rings. The student begins by looking at his own name, then moves to names of people and places around him, in ever widening categories. This system is predicated on the notion that the student begins from a known area of interest, himself, and procedes outwards.

Each student is asked to look up his given name in a standard desk dictionary. This serves a dual purpose, since the student learns the etymon of his first and middle name and is given the chance to do a dictionary exercise. By looking at a few dictionaries, he has one more basis for judging the usefulness of his wordbook. He may discover, for example, that the Random House Dictionary (College Edition) has a list of English Given Names in the endpapers, while the American Heritage Dictionary incorporates Christian names in the main text. It can do wonders for a shy boy named Leroy to discover that his name is French in origin and means the king. Of course, the same boy might have quite a different reaction if his name is Ichabod, Hebrew for without honor. Last names may present a more difficult problem for many students, but they are nonetheless intrigued by names like Lefleur, the flower, Johnston, town of John, or Schwartz, black. Many students have mentioned that it gave them a renewed interest in their family histories to discuss their origins with their parents. It often happens that students, when comparing last names of the members of the class, see patterns of national origin emerging.

Students are introduced to spot collection of data when queried about nicknames. Besides enjoying the oftentimes amusing stories behind nicknames, they have a chance to learn yet another

etymon, that nickname is originally an eke name, that is, an also name.

By using my own name, Thomas Lloyd Clark, as an icebreaker, I can incorporate a number of points into a student discussion. Thomas is derived from Aramaic (the language Christ spoke) and means twin. Since I am not a twin, this illustrates that in our culture, the earlier meaning of a name rarely has much to do with being given such a name. Parents give names because they like the sound or because the name is traditional within the family. Such a caveat is especially helpful if there are any Ichabods in the class. Or Desdemonas (Greek, unhappiness). An introduction to cultural change is also afforded here, since different cultures select names in different ways.

Lloyd, I tell students, is Welsh for gray, and serves as an example of sound change between languages. The Welsh glottal fricative is uncommon in English, which led to the name being spelled either Lloyd or Floyd. Twin boys so named consequently have variations of the same name. The sound change operates on a number of borrowed words. Buckeroo, from the Spanish, vaquero, serves as an example.

Finally, Clark hearkens back to the Middle English pronunciation of the same. originally a cleric, a c'rk came to mean one who was literate, rather than one who works in a shop. One can note the tendency for people to interpret their last names in the finest possible light, an understandable concession to family pride. At any rate, I use this last with language classes to illustrate the drifting properties of vowels in English.

We move from students' names to street names. Most people fail to realize the planning, or lack of it, that goes into street naming until they are late for a dinner party and have access to a service station map compiled a decade ago. Any number of points are raised by students when discussing their street names, from language borrowing, Ruedefrance, to whimsy, Idle Avenue. The methods of housing developers who are allowed to name their own streets show students the sometimes haphazard manner in which they are saddled with certain addresses. One developer in Las Vegas comes from Washington State, and streets are named Seattle, Tacoma, Pasco, and the like. Another is conscious of the prestige of a "right sounding" address, and laid out streets in barren desert named Pinecrest, Oakcrest, and Elmcrest. Many people who live on numbered streets are not cognizant of what point their numbers started from. They can appreciate the system used in Salt Lake City, where streets are numbered from the focal point of the Morman Temple. Streets are numbered with the direction from the Temple included: First North, Second North, Fourth South, Fifth West, and so on.

The next step is looking at pets' names. At first this looks like a shift in secuence, a movement from animate to inanimate and back, but tends to work well since everyone has an address, but not everyone has a pet. Younger students delight in cataloguing all the pets they have had or have known, and are intrigued by the sometimes strange types of pets others have owned. Older students enjoy comparing naming oddities displayed by others of their peer group. In either case, it soon becomes evident that names tend to

fall into categories as pets described fall into types. For many, the day of dogs being named Fido, Rex, and King are past. Exotic names for dogs are favored. Names like Sabrina, Germain, or full names, like John Phipps, or Franklin C. Dog are popular. For many pet owners, the length of the name is inversely proportional to the dubiousness of lineage. An insight is also offered into what sparks our naming process by learning what kinds of pets do not have names as opposed to those that do. Fish, for example, are often nameless, while plants sometimes bear very human names like Arthur and Wanda.

Besides collecting the names of domestic pets such as cats, birds, raccoons, skunks, and hamsters, students are encouraged to discover what names are popular for farm animals. The same process seems to operate as with house pets. Cows are often named, pigs more rarely. From there, students can move to performing animals, in the circus or on television. A naming game involving word play can be enjoyed by older students. Puns are employed in fantacizing names for race horses. A couple of examples explain the game: Whirlwind, by Stormy Weather out of Dervish; Cleopatra, by Roman Pride out of Dark Lady; Spot Cash, by Uptight out of Needle Owen.

The next concentric ring is the study of cities. This is normally approached by asking students where their families are from. Doing so usually produces a number of interesting stories about how towns got named. Then, when looking at a map, students are overwhelmed by the apparent randomness of town names. A method of dealing with this is demonstrated by Roger Shuy in his NCTE booklet, Discovering American Dialects. An apparent mishmash

list of names is examined. By categorizing names as to whether they are Indian, German, French, Hellenic, and so forth, a system begins to emerge.

When moving on to topographic names, it is easier to concentrate for a time on a particular feature, either mountains or rivers, for example. A favorite of mine is springs in the Southwest that have the Paiute affix pah, meaning water in the name. In the Las Vegas area, students normally come up quickly with names like Tonapah and Pahrump. A cursory perusal of a state map yields Pah Roc and Pah Ute. The excitement of a rewarded search is afforded by ranging to further regions and finding names like Ivan Pah and Paranagat.

While moving through these concentric rings from the individual to state names and beyond, the student begins to grasp the importance of names study, and more importantly, begins to see order in the apparent chaos of names surrounding him. Usually, the methodical approach leads the students to areas of their own discovery. They fall with delight on brand names in the supermarket. The categories for investigation suggested by students have included the names of cars, not only the brand names, but the names teens like to give their personal automobiles, like Sudden 1, Thunderchicken, Tower of Power. The field widens as students suggest gathering names of boats, Ketchum, Bass Lass, Big Bertha, plants, Arthur, Rhoda, and mountain or shore retreats, While Away, Drop Inn, Stop By.

It is a simple matter to nudge students toward particular concentrations of naming categories once they have seen that nearly

all names are patterned. The characters in Ben Johnson's play, Volpone (The Fox) or any number of comedies from Congreve's Lady Wishfort to Sheridan's Lady Teazle, take on additional meaning with the realization that names serve a number of other purposes besides labeling. And we may all internalize the meaning of words as verbal symbols that both name and transmit meaning.

One caveat might be passed on here. For many people, names can be enjoyable and educational if taken in small doses. Few spend hours reading the telephone book. Parts of the preceding process could well be incorporated piecemeal into different subject areas. One Home Economics teacher in Las Vegas relates names and recipes by adding notes on place names around New Orleans while directing her students in the art of making Gumbo. She might well set an example for others by illustrating that names study in the classroom serves nicely as a seasoning rather than a main course.